DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 163 440 CS 004 549

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TITLE Techniques for Motivating Interest in Reading for the Disadvantaged High School Student.
PUB DATE Oct 78
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association Southwest Regional Conference (7th, Little Rock, Arkansas, October 5-7, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disadvantaged Youth; *Motivation Techniques; *Reading Difficulty; *Reading Instruction; Reading Interests; Secondary Education; Student Attitudes; *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

Many reasons may be offered to explain why the disadvantaged have little interest in reading. Among these are: attitudes inherent in the family, an inability to afford reading material, a failure to perceive practical value in reading, a limited experiential background that limits understanding, and a lack of interesting and meaningful reading matter available to students in school. Some techniques that may be helpful to teachers in motivating the disadvantaged to read are: reading silently while students read; reading aloud to students; setting paperback books on their desks; reading aloud to a climactic point and stopping; allowing students to act out reading material; establishing a classroom library; advertising reading through posters, book jackets, and slogans; and utilizing the newspaper as a medium for reading. (TJ)

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TECHNIQUES FOR MOTIVATING INTEREST IN READING FOR THE DISADVANTAGED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

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"Techniques for Motivating Interest in Reading for the Disadvantaged High School Student"

George M. Usova, Ph. D.

One of the chief problems secondary school teachers encounter is that of motivating the disadvantaged youth to read. In-class reading and out-of-class reading assignments become an almost daily battle and struggle between teacher and students. This despairing situation often leads the teacher into abandoning the giving of reading assignments as the results tend to be fruitless and futile.

A number of reasons can be offered to explain why the disadvantaged have little interest in reading. One reason may lie within the attitudes inherent in the family. Perhaps the atmosphere in the home is not conducive or reinforcing toward reading. The family may not be able to afford reading material or may not perceive practical value in reading, and consequently, cannot encourage it.

Another explanation may involve the disadvantaged student's limited experiential background which would limit his understandings of traditional classroom reading material; this limited understanding of reading in classes could create a negative reception toward reading. Closely related to this may be the lack of interesting and meaningful reading matter available to students in the school, and too frequently, these students are bombarded by stories, articles, and textual material from which they can relate to very little. In other words, the reading content is irrelevant, uninteresting, and unidentifiable to the background and experience of the students.

One final explanation concerns the act of reading as an information-getting process. Quite frequently, subject-area reading bears little practical value to the disadvantaged student's immediate or future life.

They perceive the learning of dates, historical facts, mathematical problems without practical application, science theory involving little or no demonstrable utilization as not being meaningful, and hence, not worthy of reading.

Whether the above reasons occur alone or are multiple overlapping causes, the problem of interesting the disadvantaged to read must be dealt with immediately. The task is not an easy one. Trying to overcome years of resistance and negativistic attitudes toward reading may seem insurmountable; however, if the secondary teacher views reading as important (and certainly most would), then the secondary teacher must assume the responsibility of motivating the disadvantaged.

The following techniques have been successful in motivating reading for the disadvantaged. Some techniques may be more successful than others depending upon the atmosphere and psychological make-up of the classes. It is best, then, to keep an open, flexible, and experimental approach in mind toward using them; therefore, try as many as possible, if not all of them, during the course of the school year.

1. Read yourself while students read. As students read to themselves, they observe that the teacher, too, is reading; from their viewpoint, they are being reinforced that reading is valuable and important. In a subtle way, the teacher is stressing the value of reading to them.
2. Read aloud to students. This is rarely done. It is unfortunate that reading aloud to students is discontinued after elementary school. For some reason, it is considered an elementary practice exclusive to the early grades. Nothing could be further from the truth. Secondary students enjoy very much listening to interesting and enjoyable stories. By listening to these stories, student

interest in reading similarly enjoyable stories on their own will increase. (This can effectively be accomplished through taping a story and replaying it for successive classes.)

3. Set a paperback book on your desk. Student observation again enters the situation. They become curious about the teacher's private reading interests. This, then, becomes an excellent opportunity for the teacher to share the paperback.

4. Read aloud up to a climactic point and stop. Assuming that all students have a common reading to fulfill, the teacher can use this technique to capture their interest and spur them into completing a reading assignment. Whether the teacher reads from the text itself or from a related text, the intention is to build up interest to an exciting point and stop. If the build-up has been exciting, the students will want to begin reading at the point where the teacher ended to find outwhat will happen next. Needless to say, this technique need not be restricted to narrative material; it may involve how to perform a task, how to operate a device, or how to improve a skill. The only requirement involved is that the teacher read something exciting.

5. Dress-up or act-out reading material. Allowing students to live the characters in a story or role-play historical figures in the history class will make the reading more concrete and meaningful. Students become more active participants as a result of their reading rather than passive recipients of that which they may not read at all.

6. Establish a classroom library. Departing occasionally from the traditional subject-area classroom materials can be beneficial toward motivating interest in reading. The disadvantaged student

needs, as do all students, the opportunity to read those materials that personally interest him. Of course, teacher guidelines are necessary, but, through student contributions, a classroom library can be established in a corner of the room. Then class time should be given periodically to allow students to engage in their own freedom-of-choice reading.

7. Advertise reading. This technique needs to be reemphasized. Advertising can take the form of displaying posters, book jackets, and slogans of current magazines, books, and articles around the room. Students become sensitized toward reading. Their level of consciousness is raised as they are exposed to the visual stimulation of reading about the room. Books become a constant awareness -- a reminder they cannot avoid.

8. Utilize the newspaper as a medium for reading. In terms of reading relevant material for the disadvantaged youth, the newspaper can achieve this purpose well. Ranging from want-ads for getting a job, planning a budget, or furnishing a home to calculating live mathematical problems or playing the stock market, the newspaper provides an excellent resource for bringing the live and relevant world of the disadvantaged student into the classroom.

Motivating the disadvantaged is a difficult task; there are no easy answers when dealing with youth who come from complex backgrounds. A variety of techniques must be employed to determine which ones are successful. If the disadvantaged will not read, then they will learn very little. Motivating interest in reading is the initial step in achieving success toward learning through reading.